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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 005487

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SUBJECT: PRT/LASHKAR GAH - GOVERNOR DEFENDS DEAL WITH MUSA QALA
SHURA

REF: (A) KABUL 4369

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In a recent meeting with PRTOff, Helmand Governor Daud defended the Afghan government's deal with the leaders of Musa Qala district, wherein the government recognizes the leaders' right to administer the district in return for recognition of the central government's authority. Daud worried about public comments critical of the agreement that could provide fodder to those who wish to subvert the deal for their own private interests. He defended the arrangement, citing three points: the agreement was not a 'provincial agreement,' but one approved by President Karzai; the unsustainable status quo demanded change; and there was a pressing need to recognize tribal authority. Daud hoped to see public U.S. support for the arrangement. He continues to pursue arrangements with other district leaders, and is near to a deal with those of Sangin. See paragraph 12 for a summary of the Musa Qala agreement's points. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) In an October 30 meeting with PRTOff, Helmand Governor Daud expressed concern about the Ambassador's published comments in the local press on the deal between the Government of Afghanistan (GOA) and the leaders of Musa Qala, a district in the conflict-weary north Helmand. (NOTE: Under the deal, the GOA recognizes the local shura's authority and accepts its assurances to secure the district center, while the shura recognizes the GOA's authority (REF); it was followed by ISAF's withdrawal from the district center. END NOTE.)

¶3. (SBU) Informed that the comments did not constitute a rejection of the deal but a caution about the need to monitor it, Daud agreed with the need to closely watch the district, but worried that 'negative' comments lend support to those opposed to the agreement. Daud hoped the Embassy would issue a statement in support of the agreement, identifying it as a national-level agreement, and stating that all parties are concerned that it be watched closely. He then launched into a defense of the arrangement, citing (1) the fact that it was not a "provincial agreement," but one approved by President Karzai, (2) the unsustainable status quo, and (3) the need to recognize tribal authority.

¶4. (SBU) Daud rhetorically asked, "How much longer can we keep platoon houses there (i.e., in northern districts like Musa Qala), with ISAF and the Taliban firing on each other?" He said the GOA had to consider alternatives, ones that strengthened local communities. (NOTE: In a prior meeting at the Embassy, Daud indicated that recognizing local authority was the only available option, given the limited GOA resources, especially related to security. END NOTE.) Daud said, "We had to accept a deal," describing one high-level meeting wherein district leaders said that accepting their proposal would mean support for the GOA, otherwise, "Where should we go? On what other door should we knock?"

¶5. (SBU) The agreement that emerged was the product of considerable negotiation (see paragraph 12 for a summary of its points). As Daud described it, the local leaders told the Taliban not to fire. The leaders having delivered on the cease fire, it was important to recognize their success and "show them respect"; ISAF's withdrawal was the quid-pro-quo that also removed the "provocation" of ISAF's presence from the district center.

¶6. (SBU) With ISAF's withdrawal, Daud says that the Afghan flag is now flying in the district center, a local administration approved by the GOA is in place, and local security forces are keeping the peace. He dismissed those who might complain about the use of local militia for security, saying, "Forget that they are not wearing uniforms, there is peace."

¶7. (SBU) Daud alluded to unspecified 'others,' presumably warlords at odds with both the GOA and the Taliban, who wish to undermine the agreement 'for their own private interests.' He said those others had organized a group to travel to Kabul to complain about the agreement, claiming that Musa Qala was now under Taliban control. "This is not true," Daud said, adding that he sent President Karzai footage showing the Afghan flag flying in Musa Qala and interviews with locals, and that the film was shown on Afghan state television.

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(NOTE: There is anecdotal information at odds with the Governor's assertion: while people and commerce have returned to the district center, so reportedly have Taliban, albeit (possibly) unarmed. Reports from the Governor indicate the ANP has also withdrawn from the district. Also, in a meeting on October 31 with PRT representatives, one local asked whether there was truth to the rumor that the Taliban demanded that the Afghan flag be removed from the district center. END NOTE.)

¶8. (SBU) The Governor is close to securing an agreement with the shura of Sangin district, located in the north. Daud has sent the agreement to Kabul, along with a list of district officials proposed by the shura. The shura has agreed to guarantee security for the road leading to adjacent Kajaki district and the dam (though it could not provide a complete guarantee for other stretches of road).

¶9. (SBU) EMBASSY COMMENT: Daud was firm in his defense of the agreement and determined to move forward, with this and similar arrangements with leaders in other districts (Nawzad has been mentioned). The agreement he secured in Helmand appears to require much from the local shura, though not always with great specificity. Putting aside for the moment different characterizations and thus uncertainty about the current situation on the ground, and local leaders' alleged sympathies for one side or another, one salient point is emerging: the cessation of violence has come at the cost of at least a temporary lessening of central government authority in the region. Reconstruction assistance might swing sympathies towards the flag the Governor says is flying in the district center, but only if it is clearly connected to an expression/acknowledgement of state authority.

¶10. (SBU) EMBASSY COMMENT (CSTC-A concurring): We do not support reliance on local militia, as it would call into question USG strategy on police reform and ANAP development. During a recent Policy Advisory Group (PAG) meeting, both NSA Rassoul and Minister of Defense Wardak stated in their agreement with Ambassador Neumann that there must be independent confirmation of the security

situation in Musa Qala. The proposal discussed involved sending 150 ANAP (training in Helmand started on Nov. 4, with the first group coming from Lashkar Gah and Nahri Sarraj districts) once the ANAP are trained, Minister Wardak stated that they should be sent to Musa Qala to judge whether the people accept newly recruited and trained police. This force will also be able to judge the situation within Musa Qala. However, in a subsequent PAG on Nov. 8, it sounded like all of ANAP would be recruited in Musa Qala, although they would receive two weeks training and equipment from national forces.

¶11. (SBU) EMBASSY/CFC-A COMMENT CONTINUED: The situation within Musa Qala must be told to the people of Afghanistan. The press must portray the situation that the GOA is using innovative solutions to provide for the safety and security of the people and furthermore that the GOA is using Afghan solutions to provide for the security of the people. This will demonstrate the GOA's concern and the development of greater capability within the government. Such information operations should be undertaken, however, only when the GOA and ISAF are assured of the results of this agreement. Ambassador Neumann has been pushing this point actively (septel).
END COMMENT.

¶12. (SBU) Summary of points in Musa Qala agreement:
- "Local Administration" (LA) will work to serve the public, under the Afghan national flag.
- Uphold the constitution and avoid illegal activity.
- Maintain security in district, help stabilize region.
- Facilitate development and rehabilitation projects.
- Collect taxes and consult with provincial authorities on spending them on welfare activities.
- The LA will support children going to schools and keep doors open to the public. (NOTE: The government would tolerate the curriculum being limited to the Koran if that was the shura's choice; no explicit direction to permit girls' attendance.)
- Facilitate government missions and NGO activities.
- Cooperate on keeping roads open.

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- Guarantee the movement and security of international and national security forces while relocating; protect government property.
- LA committed to not supporting any insurgency in other districts and to not letting the district to again become a haven for terrorists.
- LA will cooperate with Ulemas to try to bring "Islamic unity and fraternity" to all people in the region, bring peace and remove enmity.
- Ban and control illegal arms.
- Facilitate the return of IDPs.
- Approved LA will commence activities only after Governor's approval.
- Adjust arrangements only in agreement with the Governor.
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